



Cambridge International AS & A Level

THINKING SKILLS

9694/21

Paper 2 Critical Thinking

May/June 2023

1 hour 45 minutes



You must answer on the enclosed answer booklet.

You will need: Answer booklet (enclosed)

INSTRUCTIONS

- Answer **all** questions.
- Follow the instructions on the front cover of the answer booklet. If you need additional answer paper, ask the invigilator for a continuation booklet.

INFORMATION

- The total mark for this paper is 50.
- The number of marks for each question or part question is shown in brackets [].

This document has **8** pages. Any blank pages are indicated.

Section A

Study the evidence and then answer Questions 1 and 2.

Source A**Extract from book *A Simple Introduction to Economics***

The practice of automobile manufacturers making frequent minor changes to their models is an example of 'planned obsolescence'. This practice has multiple advantages for the world economy. Those people who want to have the latest model and can afford to do so buy a new car every year. These repeated sales create employment for workers in the automobile industry; these workers pay taxes to the government, and spend the remainder of their wages on buying other products, which in turn pays the wages of other workers. The cars which have been driven for only a year can be bought by people who cannot afford to be in the forefront of fashion but need a reliable car.

Source B**Website of consumer protection organisation**

Many of the complaints we receive refer to planned obsolescence – the practice of manufacturers increasing sales of their products by reducing their lifespan and making it difficult or impossible to repair them when they break. Domestic appliances such as washing machines often develop faults much sooner than they used to. The cost of spare parts for newer models has gone up and the technical support available is very limited. Most customers find it easier to buy a new appliance than to attempt to repair their current machine.

Several well-known examples of planned obsolescence relate to printers for computers. Most ink cartridges cannot be refilled and therefore have to be replaced. It is not surprising that 350 million ink cartridges currently end up in landfill each year in the US. Furthermore, although printers are often available cheaply, the ink cartridge they come supplied with soon needs to be replaced and the replacement may cost more than the printer itself. In addition, when computer operating systems are updated, existing printers often cease to function and have to be replaced.

Software updates limit the life of smartphones. Many people believe that some updates are designed deliberately to slow down older phones, in order to encourage owners to upgrade. The lifespan of batteries in laptops and smartphones is apparently shortened artificially, and even if replacement batteries are available, they are so expensive that most people choose to buy a new device.

Source C**Statement from lawyers specialising in the law concerning electronic products**

We are acting on behalf of a group of major producers of computers, software, smartphones and electronic consumables. Our clients absolutely deny recent allegations that they incorporate planned obsolescence into their products in order to increase sales of new devices. The features referred to have been introduced in response to customer demand or in the interests of safety. In order to make smartphones more compact, with no loss of capability, batteries have become inaccessible, making it impossible to replace them when they stop working effectively. Fortunately, this is not a problem, since modern batteries last for many years. Although manufacturers do set a limit to the lifespan of batteries in laptops and smartphones, this is a safety feature, designed to prevent fires or damage to devices resulting from using old batteries that no longer work properly.

Source D

News report 2018

In France, it is a criminal offence to shorten the lifespan of a product deliberately. A major multi-national producer of electronic products has been fined \$27 million (their profit for about three hours' work) after admitting that older smartphones were deliberately slowed by software updates; however, they claimed that the reduction in operating speed was in order to prevent diminishing battery performance. Following the judgement, the company has drastically reduced the prices of replacement batteries.

- 1 (a) Is Source A an argument? Justify your answer. [2]
- (b) Source A regards planned obsolescence as a good thing, whereas Source B takes a more negative attitude towards it.
- Identify **two** differences between Source A and Source B which can explain these different attitudes. [2]
- (c) Source B states that 'Domestic appliances such as washing machines often develop faults much sooner than they used to.'
- This may be in order to encourage consumers to buy new products more frequently. Suggest **one alternative** explanation for this phenomenon. [2]
- (d) (i) Explain the ways in which the reliability of Source C is affected by *vested interest*. [3]
- (ii) How significant is Source C in relation to a claim that manufacturers of electronic products use planned obsolescence to exploit their customers? [3]
- (e) Suggest **two** reasons why the law case reported in Source D may **not** deter manufacturers of electronic communication products from incorporating planned obsolescence in their products. [2]
- 2 You are advised to spend some time planning your answer before you begin to write it.

'Legal restrictions should be placed on the practice of planned obsolescence.'

To what extent do you agree with this claim? Write a short, reasoned argument to support your conclusion, using and evaluating the evidence provided. [8]

Section B

Read the following passage and then answer Questions 3, 4 and 5.

- 1 Appeals to popularity have long been criticised as logically flawed, but in practice arguments of this kind are a useful guide. If a million people hold a particular opinion and one individual disagrees with it, the majority view is correct. No one has the necessary time or expertise to form their own opinion about every issue that arises in their life and so they ought to accept the majority view on everything. This approach is the basis for education in school, where whatever most people believe is rightly taught to children as factual.
- 2 If students are invited to ask questions at the end of a university lecture, someone may challenge the fundamental presuppositions underlying the lecture. This is not helpful, because it distracts attention from the specific content of the lecture. It is as if someone having a house built were to keep distracting the builders from constructing the walls in order to dig up and inspect the foundations. In order to participate in study at university level, it is necessary to accept certain widely held beliefs, assumptions and attitudes without constantly questioning them.
- 3 A father once advised his son, who was about to enter the army: 'Watch what everyone else does, and do the same.' That was good advice, because in the armed forces – and in many other situations – people who are seen to be different from their fellows will be bullied. Being bullied by co-workers or neighbours for being different ruins people's lives, sending them into a downward spiral of depression and despair.
- 4 Some actions – such as kissing in public – cause offence to many, not because there is anything intrinsically wrong with them, but because they go against generally accepted behavioural norms. Everyone should follow these standards whether they agree with them or not.
- 5 The best policy in life is, therefore, to imitate the actions and opinions of the majority. Admittedly, subsequent history has occasionally revealed that an accepted opinion or customary behaviour was wrong and an eccentric individual was right, but in practice it is better to ignore this possibility, because such situations are very rare indeed.

- 3 (a) Using the exact words from the passage as far as possible, identify the *main conclusion*. [2]
- (b) Using the exact words from the passage as far as possible, identify **two intermediate conclusions** from paragraphs 3 to 5. [4]
- (c) Identify the argument element and explain the function of the following words from paragraph 4:
- ‘kissing in public’ [2]
- (d) Identify an *unstated assumption* required by the reasoning in paragraph 4. [2]
- 4 (a) Identify and explain **two flaws or weaknesses** in paragraph 1. [4]
- (b) Evaluate the *analogy* in paragraph 2. [3]
- (c) Identify and evaluate an *appeal* in paragraph 3. [3]

- 5 *You are advised to spend some time planning your answer before you begin to write it.*

‘Everyone should use the period of adolescence to develop their own opinions and values.’

Write your own short argument to support **or** challenge this claim. The conclusion of your argument must be stated. Credit will not be given for repeating ideas from the passage. [8]

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